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A Captive Maiden in Damascus

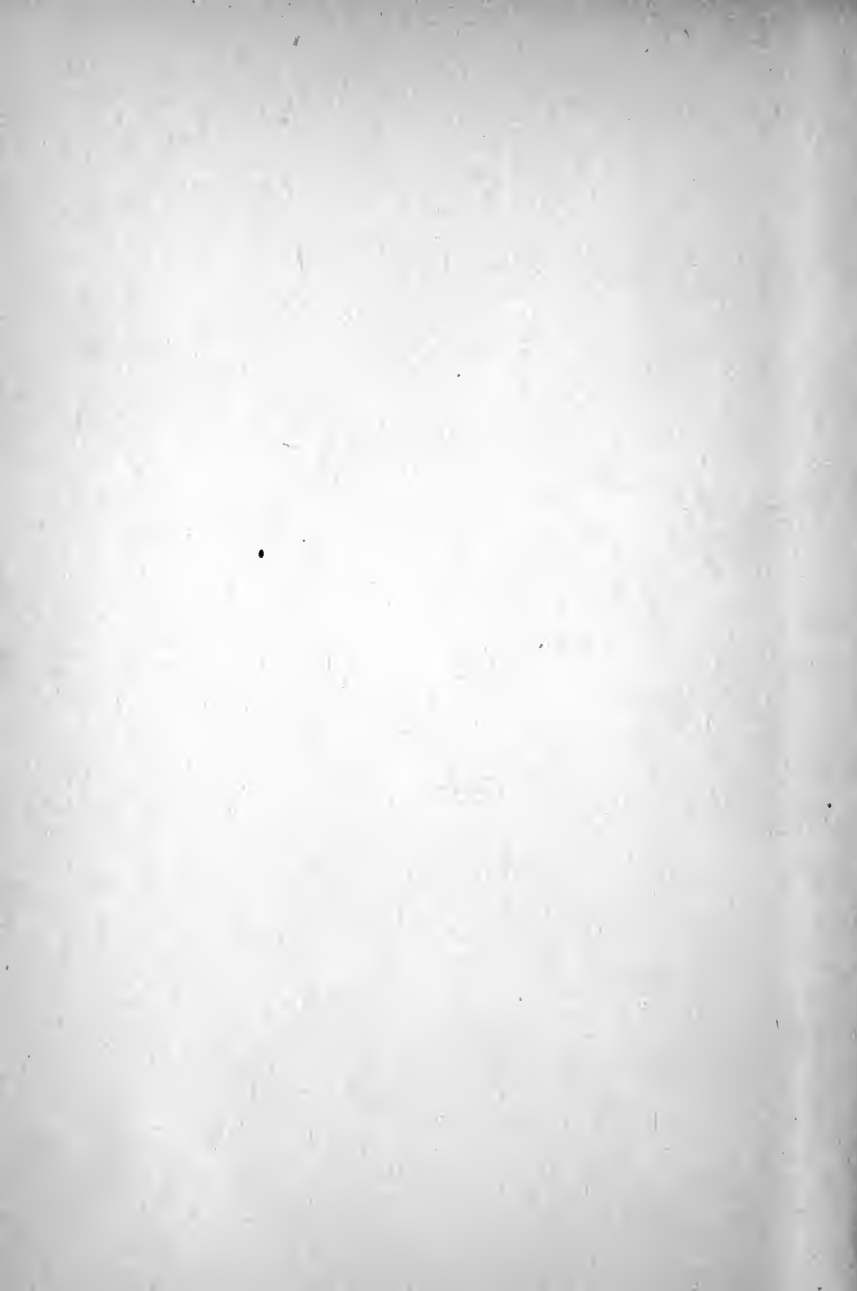
BY
John Rea

A Drama in Five Acts



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A Captive Maiden in Damascus

A Drama in Five Acts

BY
JOHN REA
Author of "The Pet Dove."

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1915

"A Captive Maiden in Damascus."

Synopsis

Naaman, leader of the armies of Syria, a man of noble character, has concealed from every one except Eliezer, his steward, the fact that he has been stricken with "white leprosy", a malignant and incurable disease.

On his return from a campaign, during which the spot on his arm has spread alarmingly, his wife and daughters are eagerly awaiting his home coming; but he delays going to his house while despairingly seeking relief at the many shrines of Rimmon in the city.

The King, aware only that his favorite is in deep trouble, endeavors to lighten Naaman's burden by royal favors, but without avail. At length a meeting with his family becomes inevitable. Naaman reveals his trouble, but, unable to remain in the presence of those he loves so dearly, leaves them plunged in the deepest distress.

In this extremity, Rachel, a captive Jewish maiden, whom the warrior has presented to his wife, having, some time before, discovered her master's dread secret, makes known her earnest wish that he would go to the Prophet in Samaria, confident that Elisha can heal him of his leprosy.

The succeeding events reveal the deep impression made upon the household by Rachel's unquestioning faith.

Naaman visits the Prophet and in due time returns, entirely restored to health. An altar is erected and dedicated to Jehovah and the story ends as Naaman is receiving the ardent congratulations of his friends upon his wonderful recovery.

The play is based upon the record found in 2nd Kings, Chapter V.

A Captive Maiden in Damascus

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

CAST

NAAMAN, Captain of the army of Ben-Hadad, King of Syria.

BARDA, Wife of Naaman.

RIMMONA and RIFKA, Their daughters; 15 and 10.

RACHEL, A captive maiden of Israel; about 15.

ELIEZER, Naaman's Steward; a young man.

CHANINA, Steward of Ben-Hadad; an elderly man.

CHESIL, The Court Jester; a young man.

ZAELI, The Court Story-Teller; a man of middle-age.

ABANA, The Court Singer, a young lady; low voice.

KATANE, TORRA, ORMA and BERDE, Court Dancers;
beautiful young children.

Two unnamed Syrian women.

Two or three unnamed women musicians.

Place—The House of Naaman in Damascus

Time—About 900 B. C.

BEN-HADAD, King of Syria, in Damascus.

JEHORAM, King of Israel, in Samaria.

ELISHA, Prophet of Israel, in Samaria.

RIMMON, The Deity worshiped in Damascus.

Costumes

Same as those used at present among the higher classes in Persia and other Eastern countries. The girls wear short jackets of bright colored materials, short, flowing skirts with wide girdles and loose trousers gathered at the ankles.

A Captive Maiden in Damascus.

ORCHESTRAL PRELUDE

ACT 1.

(The curtain rises on a room off the central court of the house of Naaman. A low, wide dais around its three closed sides; luxuriously furnished with rugs and cushions in keeping with the general color scheme. No furniture except vases for flowers and a tall taboret having a raised margin, the latter in reality a house-altar of Rimmon, the deity worshipped in Damascus, at present used as a flower stand. Rimmona and Rifka busily engaged in arranging floral pieces around the room, stopping now and then to admire their work.)

RIFKA—Oh sister, how beautiful the flowers are to-day!

RIMMONA—They are indeed lovely, Rifka; which of them dost thou admire the most?

RIFKA—Oh, the pomegranates always. Thou art a 'pomegranate' by name,—and then, it is father's favorite flower.

Oh how I wish he were at home again.

RIMMONA—So indeed do I. But if I were a man I believe I would be a soldier like father; only I wouldn't want to go to war and fight. What wouldst thou choose to be?

RIFKA—I am not sure; but I don't believe I would want to be a man. I'd rather be one of the King's Dancers. Think what a perfectly lovely time they have. Almost every day good old Chanina and his wife take them to the "Place of the Meeting of the Waters," or the "Enchanted Gardens," or of an evening to the "Citadel." And I do just love to dance!

(Rifka, humming a tune, dances a pretty step; Rimmona still working among the flowers, pausing now and then to watch and admire her sister; smiling all the time.)

RIMMONA—I believe mother is becoming more anxious about father every day. Why do people have to fight all the time? I can't imagine father killing anybody or cutting anybody in two with that big sword, canst thou?

RIFKA—I don't believe he does. I think he has the soldiers do it for him while he looks the other way. He's too tender hearted to hurt anything himself.

(Barda enters, smiling. Girls embrace her affectionately, while she goes about, admiring the decorations.)

BARDA—Ah, I see my little artists have been at work again. What beautiful pomegranates, Rifka. They are thy father's favorite flower. And here are violets and roses and myrtle and eglantine; and is this the little one thy father loves to call "Stop and look"?

RIMMONA—Yea, and I call Rifka by that name very often. I can't help it, for it seems to suit her so perfectly.

It doesn't seem possible that father can be kept away very much longer, so Rifka and I have agreed to arrange the flowers every day, just as though we really expected him any minute.

Wouldn't it be lovely if he were to come in and surprise us! Oh, mother, just think!

BARDA—(aside). Four long months! And the runners bring only vague rumors of 'success,' whatever that may mean. My heart is weary of these continual delays and uncertainties.

(Sound of trumpet outside and cries, as of excited people.)

BARDA—Listen, children! Listen! Oh, I wonder if another runner has arrived with news from the army?

(Heavy footsteps heard outside. All start up quickly. Eliezer enters hurriedly; bows low to all.)

BARDA—Oh, here is Eliezer! What news, what news?

ELIEZER—I bring the best of good tidings to the house of Naaman. The army has returned victorious and is now encamped just without the City walls.

BARDA—(Eagerly.)—And is my husband there too, safe and sound?

ELIEZER—(Evasively.) Naaman has returned with the army, bringing with him great honor and glory to the King, much spoil of war and many captives. The war is over, I hope for ever.

BARDA—And when may we have our Naaman with us again, good Eliezer?

ELIEZER—(With hesitation.) That I cannot so clearly answer, good lady. He bade me bring you all his warmest love, but to say that he will be detained in camp until tomorrow, or perchance, a little later.

BARDA—(Disappointed.) Oh, what could possibly detain him now? It is not like him to allow the least delay; and we are so eager to see him at home again.

ELIEZER—(Reluctantly.) I can only answer by giving you this further news. Naaman has resigned his command in the army and, with the King's assistance, is now making arrangements for the promotion of Hazael to be Captain of the Host in his stead. Ben-Hadad is extremely loth to let him go, but, for some secret reason, Naaman insists upon being relieved. It has occasioned widespread regret in the camp, but my master keeps his own counsel and not even the king knows what his motives are.

BARDA—(Sadly.) And so that old army word 'tomorrow,' comes back again to sing its unwelcome song of delay and uncertainty in our ears. Well,—it will be a comfort to know that at least, he goes to war no more.

ELIEZER—Yea, my lady. A very great comfort, unless—

BARDA—(Startled.) "Unless!" Unless what? Art thou concealing something from us, Eliezer? Some ill news? I beg thee not to trifle with us at a time like this.

ELIEZER—Madam, while life remains my unswerving devotion and service shall be to my master and his family. I know that, for some obscure reason, this campaign has greatly burdened the noble Captain of the Host. He is a soldier but he is far more a man and there have been many trying times for us all.

BARDA—The Gods grant they may be really over now! Well, give him our dearest love, Eliezer; but, I beg of thee, withhold it from him that I am not wholly satisfied.

RIFKA—And, good Eliezer, give him this flower from his little girl, wilt thou? I was going to ask thee to take a kiss to him from me but, I guess I will change my mind and keep it safely for him until I see him myself.

ELIEZER—Ah, even absence has its moments of reward and one of them will be when he takes this pretty flower in his hand and learns what awaits him here at home.

(Eliezer goes out. Barda looks after him questioningly. The girls come to her side and embrace her ardently.)

RIMMONA—Oh, aren't we happy, mother! Let me put a flower in thy hair! I wish father could come in on us now. Isn't it splendid that he has returned safely and that he is not to go away again?

RIFKA—And won't he be pleased to find us all so well and happy and so hungry to see him? I know lots of ways to make him happy, mother. Just wait! Father and I are the very best of friends. We are regular chums, even if he is so big and strong. I feel as if I could eat him right now.

BARDA—Yea, my dearies, but, (looking at the girls and petting them.) suppose you allow me to be alone here for a little while, I want to think about something. I don't know why it is but my heart is full of a strange foreboding. These unusual messages and this delay and this odd turn of affairs in the army all come so unexpectedly upon me that I am bewildered and know not what to think.

(Girls embrace and kiss her and then retire. Barda stands fingering the flowers on the taboret.)

BARDA—(Alone and slowly.) Oh that word tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow! I never hear it, when Naaman is away without a shiver. What does it portend this time? "Tomorrow"?—and he has "resigned from the army,"—I should be happy and, yes, I am,—but I am not satisfied.

And what was that word Eliezer used? "It would be a comfort that Naaman went to war no more,—unless,"—Unless what? O, I dread that word! (Shivers.) It leaves a dark door open somewhere, through which a shadow may so easily creep in upon me. Well, I must bear it and wait as patiently as I can.

(With uplifted eyes and clasped hands.)

O, Rimmon! Be merciful!

(Here Barda takes the blossom from her hair and lays it upon the altar; lifts the vase of flowers from its top; kneels; lifts up her eyes and, holding the vase aloft, murmurs softly:)

BARDA—O, Rimmon, All-powerful, deal gently with thy servant Naaman, for he has ever been faithful unto thee.

ACT 2.

(The next day. The same room, brilliantly decorated with fresh flowers; orientally beautiful with gorgeous curtains, cushions and rugs. Barda, Rimmona and Rifka arranging bouquets, as before, but far more eagerly.)

RIFKA—(Skipping about joyously.) Father is coming today! Father is coming today!

Father will surely come today, will he not, mother? Is not that what Eliezer said?

BARDA—Eliezer only said "perhaps." We must be patient, Rifka. It would make father unhappy if he thought we could not wait even one day longer, while he is busy; especially when we know he is safe in camp and so near home.

RIFKA—And won't it be just splendid to have him here with us all the time, and no more war. Oh, I think that is the best of all. I wish he could see the rooms just as they are now. Maybe he will. Aren't they lovely, Rimmona? Just look at this rose and this one, and this!

(The girls go about, fussing with the flowers and cushions, Barda sitting on the dais, watching them, smiling. A rap at the door. Eliezer enters and bows. All rise and eagerly exchange salutes, as if in haste to hear him speak.)

ELIEZER—The noble Captain of the Host sends greetings and love to you every one, but with this most regretful message. It will be impossible for him to come today, as he has not yet completed the Ceremonials of Victory in the temple of Rimmon, with the King and the High Priest. He wishes me further to say that, in order that he may appropriately accept certain courtesies of the King, he has granted Ben-Hadad the use of this room for tomorrow morning, when he may privately receive a number of friends whom the King desires to send to him. It is a function which cannot be evaded or postponed and after it is over he will meet with his family.

But today, in order that his love may not seem to spend itself in mere words, he has taken pleasure in sending, in my care, a most charming gift to his wife and children.

BARDA—What gift were half so welcome as himself, Eliezer? And why this curious arrangement about the room? I cannot understand it.

ELIEZER—It is the King's arrangement, madam, in honor of Naaman's victorious return, and my master had no alternative but to accept it. May I now have the pleasure of presenting his gift to thee?

BARDA—Thou hast brought it with thee, then?

ELIEZER—I wait only thy gracious permission to present it.

(Barda bows in consent. Eliezer goes out and soon returns, followed by two Syrian women, leading Rachel between them. As the women turn to go Rachel speaks to them in a low tone.)

RACHEL—The God of Israel reward you for all your kindness. Never has an hour passed, since I crossed over Jordan, that I have not blessed God for human love and sympathy.

ONE OF THE WOMEN—Never will we forget thee, little sister of the hills. And we wish thee, ever, the same love thou hast shown to us. Farewell.

RACHEL—Farewell, and may Jehovah remember you in peace.

(The women retire. Rachel looks sadly after them; then turns and slowly kneels before Barda, her face to the floor, then rises and stands silent before her. Barda is sitting on the dais, Rimmona and Rifka close on either side, all looking most intently upon Rachel. Rachel, poorly clad, but sweet and dignified, stands silent a few moments, then slowly lifts and holds out both her hands toward Barda, as if craving sympathy in her entire surrender of herself.)

ELIEZER—(Pointing to Rachel.) What better gift of love than a life? This maiden is a captive from the far land of Israel, tenderly cared for by the women of our camp from the first day until now; and from this time onward she is thine, with the devoted love of Naaman.

BARDA—(Anxiously.) But, truly, Eliezer, where is my lord? Art thou concealing something from me? Surely I am not to consider this little Jewish maiden a substitute for him I love?

ELIEZER—(Stepping away.) Oh, not a substitute, my lady! No gift could ever fill the place of such a giver. But, I beg thee, do not detain me now. I am instructed to return at once to the camp of my master.

BARDA—I thought the message was that he would be busy in the temple of Rimmon. But—let it pass. It is all one if Naaman come not. There is something out of joint. I know not what.

Do not let me detain thee, Eliezer, (waves him away.) Hasten to thy master, whether he be in camp or temple.

(Eliezer goes out quickly. The two girls cling close to their mother, all still looking most intently at Rachel, who stands, apparently unmoved, under their searching scrutiny. At length Barda holds out her hand toward Rachel.)

BARDA—Poor little captive! Knowest thou what I say? Dost thou understand the speech of Damaseus?

RACHEL—(Bowing low and speaking softly.) It is not my native tongue, my lady, but I am somewhat familiar with the Aramaic. Some of my people used to speak it.

BARDA—Thy name, poor little stranger?

RACHEL—(Very calmly.) My name is Rachel; for my mother.

BARDA—And thy mother—living?

RACHEL—Long since fallen asleep, my lady.

BARDA—And thy father, child?

RACHEL—I know not of him, lady, living or dead. Perhaps it were better he lay sleeping beside my mother. He is dead to me now, and, if alive, I am as good as dead to him. I alone am left of all my people.

But do not look to see me weep, my lady, for I have no more tears to shed; the fountain of that solace has turned to dust.

BARDA—(Kindly.) Sadness is not reserved alone for captives, Rachel; it sometimes lurks, unseen, in the bosoms of captors, else were pity and sympathy long since dead and buried together.

RACHEL. (Abashed, and in a begging tone.) Bid me retire, I beg thee, sweet lady, I am not fitly clad for these surroundings. As for the rest, I have nursed my sorrow and now it sleeps quietly in my bosom, and, even waking, thou shalt never hear it fret.

BARDA—(To Rimmona.) Here daughter, take Rachel with thee and deal gently with her, as thy father's gift. Take her to thy room and change her apparel. She is of about thine own age, I think. Deal with her as thou

wouldst have her deal with thee if thou wert Rachel and she Rimmona.

RACHEL—The God of Israel reward thee an hundred fold, my mistress, for thou hast spoken softly to a very lonely stranger, and thy tender voice moves me deeply to memories of my mother.

RIMMONA—(Cheerfully.) Wilt thou come with me, Rachel?

RACHEL—(Turning to go.) I seem like one that dreams! For, though I am a captive, I have been treated with this same most tender and unexpected kindness, by all the women of the camp and even by the men of war. Yea, I will go with thee gladly.

(Rimmona and Rachel go out, hand in hand.)

RIFKA—O Mother, what a darling gift! And is she OURS now? ALL OURS?

BARDA—Yea, Rifka. But I wonder what will happen when thy father hears her speak of the God of Israel? I must caution her, and thou and Rimmona must teach her of our Gods and show her how to worship in the ancient, holy places about the city, for I fear she has never learned religion.

RIFKA—How shall I treat her, mother? It will be all so new and strange to me I know I shall feel awkward at first.

BARDA—Treat her with kindness only, Rifka. Remember her heart is sore and lonely. Put thyself in her place and all will be well.

RIFKA—If I do that we shall have a new sister at once, for I love her already, she has such a soft, low, gentle voice. May I call her Rachel, mother? What a sweet name it is! (Kneels and begs.) And may her little bed lie next to mine at night, so I may hold her hand when it is dark and lonely, and I get frightened at some queer noise out in the street?

BARDA—(Smoothing her hair.) What dost thou know of darkness and loneliness, little blossom? Be careful thou dost not weary her with thy affectionate ways. Think of her as thy father's gift and, by her, keep him in thy heart until he comes again.

RIFKA—And may we take her to the Palace and the Enchanted Gardens and the Cascades of the Abana, and the Citadel, in the evening?

BARDA—We will plan for many things, but first we must have thy father at home again. Without him all else will pall upon us.

(They rise. Barda turns, as if to go out, but stops and murmurs):

BARDA—O that word "tomorrow" — "tomorrow" — "tomorrow"!

(Instead of going out she pauses and watches Rimmona and Rachel as they enter. Rachel is clad as a young Damascene, smiling and radiantly beautiful. Rifka jumps up and cries out):

RIFKA—Oh, how beautiful thou art, my new sister Rachel!

(The three smiling girls sit together on the dais, Rachel in the center, Barda standing near and looking on, well pleased.)

RIMMONA—The very first change of raiment I tried fitted her perfectly, mother. And dost thou know, Rifka, she and I are just about of one age. Isn't that lovely? (Barda slips out.)

RIFKA—Mother says we may plan to show thee all the wonderful things in Damascus. Maybe old Chanina and his wife will take us with the dancing girls, or perhaps Eliezer, if father can spare him. Hast thou ever been in Damascus, Rachel?

RACHEL—Only in dreams. But I could wish all my poor people were in captivity if this is what it means. Yet I love my native land, poor and stricken though it be. There are many little green places and gardens in the low valleys and on the slopes of Hermon, but nothing like Damascus.

RIMMONA—Tell us of thy home, Rachel, or wouldst thou rather wait awhile?

RACHEL—I can tell it all now. It was near the little city of Samaria, far, far away in Israel. The city is built upon a hill and it is quite beautiful, in its little way, but thou wouldst think it very small indeed. There is one street in it set apart entirely to the merchants of Damascus, and I have been among the bazaars there. But it is all as nothing to this.

RIMMONA—Then thou hast seen something of Damascus?

RACHEL—I have gone about a little with the women who had charge of me and with Eliezer, thy father's steward. Good man; he tried to solace me with showing me curious and strange things! Men have odd ways of trying to comfort strangers; perhaps he thought it might divert me from homesickness.

RIMMONA--There! I like him for that! It was kind of him to want to be a comfort. Eliezer is one of the kindest men I know. Father is very fond of him. I don't think he keeps anything a secret from him.

RACHEL--(With sudden interest.) What, for instance?

RIMMONA--Oh, anything personal about himself, or the camp, or the Court. They are inseparable friends.

RACHEL--(Pondering.) Will Eliezer attend with the King's company tomorrow, I wonder? He told me of their coming and I would ask him something.

RIMMONA--I know not. He will be where father is, I am sure, but we are not permitted to be present while the King's messengers are here. It is a Court affair, and very grand. Come, let us arrange the room for their meeting.

RIFKA--Shall we bring in father's great chair?

RIMMONA--Oh yea. It will be just like a throne for him. Ben-Hadad may be King of Syria, but father is King of Love here.

(They all help bring in a great arm chair; busy themselves rearranging the flowers and then, all being in readiness, they gather around the little taboret in a graceful tableau of admiration.)

Curtain

ACT 3.

(The next morning. The room as we left it in last act. Naaman, a magnificent specimen of a man and a warrior, sitting in the great arm chair, in full dress and armor, his cloak thrown over his shoulder and left arm. A sad and gloomy cast upon his fine face. Eliezer enters.)

ELIEZER--My master, Chanina, the King's most honored Steward, awaits thy pleasure.

NAAMAN--(Stirring himself a little.) Bring him in.

(Eliezer and Chanina enter. Both bow low. Naaman rises and bows also, remaining standing.)

CHANINA--Ben-Hadad, King of Syria, would, by me, do honor to Naaman, the retiring Captain of the Host, in his own house, which, henceforth, becomes his citadel; and would bestow upon him this special mark of his royal favor.

(Chanina steps forward to hand Naaman a brilliant necklace of gold and jewels. Naaman raises his inverted hand.)

NAAMAN—Pardon. One moment! Eliezer, place a cushion before Chanina, upon which he may more fittingly display this magnificent token of the generous friendship of my King.

(Eliezer places the cushion. Chanina lays the glittering token upon it, then speaks slowly and with great dignity.)

CHANINA—With this token Ben-Hadad recognizes and honors the invaluable services of Naaman, the retiring Captain, and, at the same time, regrets the secret burden which oppresses him, into the nature of which he does not now presume to inquire.

And, that he may further do what is possible, to lift the cloud, the shadow of which, he grieves to learn, has fallen upon his esteemed servant, he has sent by me some of his most gifted and most delightful courtiers, whose bright and cheerful ways have many a time relieved the weariness of his thoughts.

Receive them, he begs, with his many good wishes and may they be as a kindly and effective medicine, to the quick recovery of thy spirits.

NAAMAN—My lord, tell my King that Naaman gratefully accepts and most highly values these tokens of his friendship and sympathy. But, Chanina, as between man and man, may not this suffice for the day? I am very weary.

CHANINA—Offend him not, I beg thee, by declining to receive his messengers of good cheer. They have come with me. Thou knowest them every one. They are all thy friends.

NAAMAN—Nay, I would not do that. The gifts and good wishes of a generous king are not lightly to be esteemed. Farewell Chanina. Let the messengers come in. I will receive them as I am able.

(Chanina bows low and, escorted by Eliezer, goes out with great dignity. Eliezer returns immediately, gives the necklace to Naaman then removes the cushion and stands before his master.)

NAAMAN—(As if in pain.) How shall I escape, Eliezer? Must I bear this?

ELIEZER—Master, my heart cries “NO,”—but my judgment quarrels with the word and thrusts an unwilling and rebellious “Yes” across my lips; for Ben-Hadad is a noble and kindly King and much depends upon his favor. (Entreats.) Let the messengers come in. It will all pass. They will come in and, they will go out again and there will be an end of them.

NAAMAN—(In great agitation.) Yes. And then what, Eliezer? After they go—then what?

ELIEZER—Thy family, my master. As thou lovest them I entreat thee do not say them nay. But, see to it that they do not approach too near thee, nor offer to touch thee.

NAAMAN—How can I restrain them without wounding them? And as for myself, I can command an army more easily, for I know my weakness. (A pause.) Well then. So be it, Thou dost ever persuade me to what I would not. Let the King's people enter.

(Eliezer retires. Presently comes a great shout of laughter, the rattle of a tambourine, etc., and, a moment later, Chesil bounces into the room, in clown's clothes, turning some sort of handspring, summersault or other gymnastic turn and laughing uproariously. Without waiting a moment, or noticing Naaman in his great chair, he begins—)

CHESIL—Well, well, well! Ha, ha, ha! What's this? Am I in the palace of the King or the chalice of the Ping, or am I drunk? Where's what, anyway? Call the dog. (Whistles.) Come here sir!

(There being no response whatever, he suddenly glances up at Naaman; stares curiously, and instantly becomes silent. Then he makes a low bow, as if in mock obeisance, but in reality, because he wishes to conceal the fact that he is on the verge of fright. Naaman leans forward, looks at Chesil earnestly and kindly, then speaks, slowly and sadly.)

NAAMAN—Knowest thou what trouble is, Chesil? Hast thou ever stood in darkness so dense it might be felt around thee? When an ill-timed word stung thee like the bite of an adder? Hast thou ever known the moment when a touch of easy sympathy burnt like a live coal? There's not an atom of unkindness or rebuke in my heart for thee, Chesil, for thine is a useful and a kindly calling, to amuse and divert men in times of stress. Thou canst lighten the burden of grave affairs but, tell me this, Chesil; knowest thou an art with which to lighten affairs of the grave?

Thou art a man, Chesil, a kindly, human man, and the bubblings of thy innocent mirth have often revealed to me the inward gentleness of thy nature, but now, what thou canst feel but cannot even try to say, will help me more than any uttered word, for I stand upon the spot where human help and human hope lie dead and buried.

Say nothing of this to any one, Chesil. Think kindly of Naaman as thy steadfast friend. Let not my trouble cast a shadow on thy sunny pathway.

Take a rose with thee and, as thou goest homeward, lay it for Naaman upon the old altar of Rimmon which stands by the palace gate. Farewell, Chesil, I thank thee for what thou wouldst have done, had I been able to bear it. Farewell.

(Chesil takes a rose, covers his mouth with his hand, looks up at Naaman a moment in questioning wonder, then goes out, in absolute silence. Presently Eliezer appears.)

ELIEZER—Master, good Zaeli, the king's most gifted Story-Teller would pay his respects to thee.

NAAMAN—(wearily). Well, let him come in.

(Eliezer retires and brings in Zaeli, then goes out. Naaman rises and speaks cordially.)

NAAMAN—Thou art welcome, as an old friend, Zaeli, and I am glad to know that all fares well with thee and thine.

(Zaeli stands rather uneasily, as if uncertain how to address Naaman, then clears his throat and speaks.)

ZAELI—All Damascus is singing thy praise, most noble Naaman, yet is deeply troubled for thy welfare. The King bade me convey to thee his good wishes and, if opportunity offered, to try to lift thy thoughts from trouble by the lure of some far off scene which, like a veil, might gently steal between and dull the too vivid glare of days near at hand.

NAAMAN—So, thou wouldst beguile my sick spirit with some gentle tale of love or of mystery? Zaeli, I know thy noble purpose. It hath behind it the full measure of a good man's kindness.

I will listen, but, I beg thee, take it not amiss if I cannot hear thee to the end. Come nearer, while thou speakest, that I may read in thy countenance the movings of a sympathy too deep for words, yet just as powerless.

(Zaeli, surprised, comes nearer, stands silent a moment, then speaks.)

ZAELI—Would that my heart for thee might be read as easily as my face. Yet, Naaman, many a time have I made trouble drowsy with the flickering glitter of a far off vision.

Some ancient records have lately come to light in Bagdad which unfold a strange story of love and of the desert and of the Garden of Eden, so long believed to have been forever lost to man.

In the days of Chushan-Rishathaim, Kafka, Prince of Akerkuf, a suburb of Babylon, with his lovely daughter Karmian, had dallied in Damascus just long enough for the maiden and young Bidkar, the son of one Baldo, a noted sorcerer, to become affianced lovers.

Frightened at the prospect of impending complications, and in haste to be away, Kafka listened to unwise counsels and, instead of following the safe old Bagdad road, further to the North, started homeward across the trackless Syrian Desert, and his caravan disappeared into the fierce solitudes lying just east of the Sink of the Abana,—even more desperate then than now.

For awhile all went well but suddenly the prince found himself in want of water. Karmian now told her father that the old sorcerer had imparted to her a secret,—that one of the Jinn who still roam that desert, had of late been haunting the marshes of the Abana, until now his voice had acquired the sound of running water and that, in any time of need, if she could but hear and follow that sound she would find her way to a well.

Crazed for a drink Karmian arose that very night and wandered out, alone, into the silence. The spell of the desert came upon her.

She could hear the jackals howling afar. Life was sweet, love was sweeter and she could not bear the thought of death. Thirst had made her hearing sharp as a needle's point and now, listening as for her life, she at last heard the sound she longed for and, full of hope, she quietly slipped away from the encampment, and followed it whither it lead.

She had gone but an hour's walk when she became aware that something pale and silvery was moving at her side and, turning, she saw, to her infinite delight, the exquisite form of a Peri, wand in hand. Almost fainting, Karmian told her plight.

The gentle Peri sustained her and then offered to conduct her, quickly, whither she would go; giving her, at the same time, a carrier dove, under whose wing the Jinnee, with whom she had been in company on the marshes, had secretly fastened his private mark.

The moment Karmian took it several strange things happened, her thirst left her, and, with it, all remembrance of the encampment, and all sense of the flight of time. How far they wandered she never knew.

(Here Naaman lifted his hand and Zaeli paused in his story.)

NAAMAN—But, pardon, Zaeli, and tell me, what thinkest thou? I will put the matter plainly. Answer me this:

Can the sweet, rippling song of a lark be heard 'mid crashing thunders? Can a tale of love, though it be sweet as the warblings of a nightingale, dull to forgetfulness an ear in which is roaring the savage voice of some on-rushing flood? Has the delicate fragrance of the little white rose of Hermon strength sufficient to beat back the sickening stench of the dead camel on the desert?

If thou knewest all thy voice would reek with tears and they would drown thy story in their bitterness, even though our feet were treading the very threshold of the gates of Paradise.

The Gods reward thee, Zaeli, but, my thoughts have mutinied, and I cannot listen longer. I beg thee let me say farewell.

(Zaeli stands a moment, then bows low, covers his head and retires alone. Naaman looks after him in gloomy meditation, seeing nothing. Eliezer enters, places a rug and an ottoman on the floor before Naaman, then goes out. Abana, the Court Singer, enters softly, unannounced, carrying a guitar, sits down, arranges her draperies and awaits a signal from Naaman. Presently Naaman looks about, rises and salutes Abana with courteous grace, but sits down without giving any intimation of his wishes. Then turns to her and speaks softly.)

NAAMAN—Thou knowest that thou art ever welcome, Abana. Many a time hast thou eased my tired spirit with thy songs, and I would hear thee now. But first let me speak a word.

This seems to me a strange perversity in human life. When I am happy sad songs ever seem most keenly sweet, but when I am sad sweet songs become an agony unbearable. I know not if this arises in the secret nature of music or the perverted nature of Naaman—but, so it is. Sing on, Abana. Try a sad refrain, if thy glad heart knowest any such. I know not why I ask it, nor how it will fall with me.

It may strike me dumb, without a word to voice my helplessness, but, if I lift my hand, as thou lovest me, Abana, pray let thy song die there.

(Abana sings a plaintive melody, accompanying herself on the guitar. No sound comes from Naaman but just as the song is ending he suddenly raises his hand. The song dies away. Abana rises, looks up sadly at Naaman, then retires, silently.)

Eliezer comes in, removes the ottoman and the rug, then goes out. When all is quiet a tinkling sound is heard approaching, bright with the laughter and chatter of children, and the whispering of guitars and little bells.

Two or three musicians enter briskly and seat themselves without ceremony on the dais furthest from Naaman. As they begin to play, the Royal Dancers, Katane, etc., clad in bright, exquisite, oriental costumes skip in and begin their graceful evolutions.

Naaman watches them but, apparently, pays little attention to their lovely movements. They begin and complete their figures and then all pass out, smiling and happy, the musicians following them. After all have gone Naaman stirs himself and looks about upon the empty room.)

NAAMAN—(Wearily.) Thus comes and goes the best that earth can offer to a troubled soul! What could I say? Can one speak blasphemy to flowers? Can grace and beauty compass the language of despair? Would one willingly smear an evil stain upon a lovely picture?

How beautiful it was! How exquisite the innocence of childhood! How like to that of angels this native grace, which, surely, would beguile me, if aught on earth could do it, for I love little children. Even now I seem to feel the bruise which came in falling from the trifling height to which their beauty lifted me.

And now! What next? How dare I turn to wife and children, the very substance and fragrance of heaven's best balm? What if they should offer to touch me,—to embrace me? But—(calling) Eliezer! Eliezer!

(Eliezer comes quickly and stands, awaiting Naaman's word. Naaman rises and speaks.)

NAAMAN—Are there not others to come from the King, Eliezer?

ELIEZER—No, my master; they are gone.

NAAMAN—All of them?

ELIEZER—Yes, Master, every one.

NAAMAN—(Shuddering.) Then, bid my wife and my sweet girls come in!

(Eliezer bows. Slowly retires. From the further side of the room Barda, Rimmona and Rifka, clinging together in a frightened group enter, but advance only a few steps when they stop, with eyes fixed upon Naaman, who stands before them with folded arms and downcast eyes, as if a prisoner of fate. Barda speaks, in a low, frightened tone.)

BARDA—Is this, then, the victorious homecoming of my beloved Naaman? Can it be reality, or am I in the grip of some fierce dream?

NAAMAN—(With great effort.) Barda, beloved, I am thy Naaman,—yet—yet must I tell thee something fiercer than any dream.

I bear upon my body an ugly wound which must be healed ere ever again I may touch either thee or these sweet children.

(Barda starts forward, staring in incredulity.)

BARDA—A wound upon thy body? Oh, Naaman!

(Naaman holds out his inverted hand, to prevent a nearer approach.)

NAAMAN—Were it a saber cut, dear Barda, I could perhaps show it to thee with pride. But as it is.—I dare not even speak its cursed name in thy pure presence. Only this I crave, believe in my undying love. Leave me for awhile. There yet remains for me to hang a jewel upon the Holy Tree and to visit the Tomb of Righteous Abel. And after that, if, unless, tomorrow, perhaps?

Nay I cannot bear it! Let me away! I seem to suffocate within the house!

(Naaman throws his mantle over his shoulders and strides out.)

BARDA—Is it madness? Or, (as if in recollection.) Oh Rimmon! Has that small white spot, which long ago appeared upon his arm, taken root and struck its hideous fangs into his very reason? (agonizingly.) Oh Rimmon! Rimmon! has it come to this? Canst thou not help?

And if there is no help in thee why should we adorn this house with flowers? Come, children, take them away! I cannot bear the sight of them, nor will we ever enter here again until—unless. Oh there it is again, that hideous word! Come, take them away! Take them away!

(The bewildered girls begin to remove the flowers. Barda watches them and directs them in great agitation.)

RIFKA—(plaintively.) May I not leave one little flower of hope, dear mother? Just one? Upon the altar? Please, mother.

(Barda does not answer. Covers her face with her hands and goes out. Girls take away all the flowers. Rimmona, her hands full of blossoms, goes out silently, as one in a dream, dazed.)

Rifka takes a little bloom from her hair and puts it in a vase on the taboret. Kisses it lovingly, pets it, caresses it, looks longingly at it with clasped hands. Then slowly goes out, looking backward, waves her hand toward the flower, smiles, throws a kiss to it and is gone.

A moment later Barda enters, carrying in her hands a jewel case. Coming before the altar she opens the box and takes from it a string of lovely pearls, which she holds up as she speaks.)

BARDA—O Rimmon! Once more I come a suppliant. These I give thee in sacrifice. Accept them and spare my husband!

(Kneeling she takes out golden trinkets, pearls, rings, and necklaces, laying them one by one upon the taboret, saying after each gift.)

BARDA—O Rimmon! Spare my husband and I will give thee all!

(Curtain falls upon Barda, kneeling before the altar of Rimmon, which she has covered with jewelry.)

Curtain

ACT 4.

(The next morning the room is seen, empty, save for Rifka's little flower and the glittering jewels upon the taboret. Naaman enters excitedly; disheveled; calls loudly.)

NAAMAN—Eliezer! Eliezer! (Eliezer enters quickly.)

ELIEZER—Here I am, my master.

NAAMAN—It is well. Sit down a moment until I reach a quiet spot on this fierce road of thought. (Pause. Eliezer sits down.)

Early this morning I received a message from my wife and now I would learn something from thee. Come nearer! (Eliezer rises and stands before Naaman.)

NAAMAN—Knowest thou the servants in this house?

ELIEZER—I do, my master, every one.

NAAMAN—What became of that little captive maid of Samaria. Didst thou do with her as I directed?

ELIEZER—Yea, my lord, and she is here now, beloved as if she were a daughter of the house.

NAAMAN—What is her name, if thou dost remember it?

ELIEZER—Yea, I remember it well,—but,—I love it better.

NAAMAN—Let that pass. What is it?

ELIEZER—Her name is Rachel.

NAAMAN—Bring her to me and then leave us alone until I call thee.

(Eliezer goes out and presently returns with Rachel, who bows low, then kneels before Naaman. Eliezer retires.)

RACHEL—Peace be unto thee, my master!

NAAMAN—And peace be unto thee Rachel; but rise up and stand before me—I would ask thee something. (Rachel rises.)

Didst thou see those people when they went away yesterday?

RACHEL—I did, my master, every one.

NAAMAN—What said they as they were leaving?

RACHEL—They all went sorrowing. Some said “God forbid” and one, an old man, said “Would God I might lift that cloud.”

NAAMAN—What meant he by “that cloud,”—if thou knowest?

RACHEL—Nay, I could not know what he meant, but I know that a cloud may hide the sun. Trouble is a cloud,—sickness sometimes,—(she pauses and looks intently at Naaman)—but, O, Master, hopelessness is the blackest cloud of all. Perhaps that was his meaning.

(A pause)

NAAMAN—Hast thou ever been in the temple of Rimmon, Rachel?

RACHEL—Once, my master, to look on and admire. But not to worship.

NAAMAN—Hast thou ever talked with my wife about that visit?

RACHEL—Yea, master, many times.

NAAMAN—Hast thou ever spoken of the God of Israel in her hearing?

RACHEL—Surely, O master, thou dost not believe I would be ashamed to own the God of my fathers?

(A pause)

NAAMAN—What thinkest thou, of thyself, Rachel, concerning me?

RACHEL—(with hesitation.) Wilt thou be angry, good master, if I speak plainly?

NAAMAN—No. What wouldst thou say? Speak plainly.

RACHEL—(slowly). O, master! Thou art stricken with a malady which God alone can heal.

NAAMAN—Wouldst thou fly this room if I should name it?

(Rachel speaks distinctly, but with great reluctance.)

RACHEL—O, my master, I cannot dissemble before thee,—but,—I know what it is!

NAAMAN—Dost thou dare name it to me?

RACHEL—If need be, my master, but it might scald my tongue.

NAAMAN—(leaning forward and speaking with intensity). What is it?

(A pause, then Rachel answers, agonizingly.)

RACHEL—O, good master, must I speak it?

NAAMAN—(rising and commanding.) Yea, I command thee.

RACHEL—Master, Master!—thou art—thou art a LEPER.

(Naaman, shuddering, drops back into his chair.)

NAAMAN—How didst thou learn of this, Rachel?

RACHEL—(calming herself) Once, in the camp, I saw thee look strangely at thine arm, and then I beguiled the truth from Eliezer.

NAAMAN—What else dost thou know?

RACHEL—I know that thou hast tried every human remedy and tested every spiritual influence which claimed the power of relief. Thou hast been devout at the temple of Rimmon, thou has visited the Rivers and the Tomb of Righteous Abel; thou hast bestowed rich offerings and hung thy mantle upon the Sacred Tree; thou hast prayed in the Holy Gardens and bathed in the Enchanted Fountains; yet it has all been in vain, and, O master, had I dared, I would have told thee that from the beginning.

NAAMAN—And so thou despisest these ancient and holy things, upon which, as thou knowest, I have rested my hope of recovery? Is this loyalty?

RACHEL—(protesting.) Nay, Nay, good master, I am loyal to thee for thou knowest that true loyalty is loyalty to truth. And why should I despise God's innocent and beautiful world?

(A pause, after which Naaman speaks even more earnestly.)

NAAMAN—Rachel, I have called thee here because it has been brought to me that, last night, after all the household were asleep, thou didst secretly talk with my wife regarding me. What hast thou to say?

RACHEL—(after a moment's hesitation.) Listen, good master, and I will gladly tell thee of it all.

I was lying awake, for my burden for thee was too heavy, and I could not sleep. Little Rifka was sleeping quietly beside me, holding my hand and, when I released it, I sat up to consider and to pray. While thus engaged I heard the sound of weeping and at once I arose and followed until I reached the beside of my mistress.

She saw me as I came and asked anxiously for the children and what I would? I knelt beside her and said: "O my mistress, my heart is breaking for thee and I cannot sleep!"

She replied: "What wouldst thou do, a poor, little captive?" I said: "I would comfort thee if only I might."

She said: "If thou hast ever seen a man rot of leprosy thou wouldst know that my trouble lies beyond either comfort or relief. Even Rimmon, whom I worship, gives only evasive promises and never a fulfillment."

I asked: "Has Rimmon ever been known to recover a man from his leprosy?" But she said: "Urge me not to sweep away my only hope with the black answer I must give thee to that question."

I murmured: "Would that I had courage to tell thee what I believe." But she waved me away, saying it was no time to rebuild, with alien thoughts, the crumbling temple of her faith.

"Nay," I said, "I would not attempt that, nor need I. Faith is of the substance of the soul and never dies. It is the same either in truth or falsehood."

"Well then," she asked, "What wouldst thou?"

I answered: "I would leave the temple as it is, but I would have thee enthrone a God within it, and let thy sinking faith lay hold upon Him."

But she answered, bitterly: "What then must thou think of Rimmon?" I answered: "Of Rimmon; nothing! nothing! nothing! I would only try to fill an empty heart with the love of a living God, for which it cries aloud."

But, she said: "Of what avail to make a change?"

I begged her not to think of it as "change." "It is but the filling of an empty vessel. The throne of thy heart is vacant and it hungers for a sovereign. O, pardon, mis-

tress, but I must ask it: Hast thou, for thyself, as yet had one atom of relief or hope or courage or sympathy from Rimmon? Or has thou, with all thy devotion to him, stayed for one moment that hideous white finger which is scoring earth's fiercest death upon thy husband's arm? No, nor can it, for it is powerless, more feeble than the gentle spirit of any little bruised and fragrant herb. O, believe me, mistress, Rimmon is but a blank, an empty delusion, a nothing, and, if no other help comes, my master's fate is sealed."

"Then," she said, "There is no help!"

"Listen," I said, "There is a God; a God of love and power and pity; Jehovah of Israel."

But she turned from me saying: "So say they all. Every one to his own little divinity. Who can know? Life is too short—and the curse is swift as a racing camel." Then she turned upon me bitterly: "Did thy Jehovah deliver thee in the time of thy anguish?"

"Yea," I gladly answered, "and, O, that I could show thee, as I do daily to Him, my gratitude, for thou art part of that deliverance. I can truly say: 'He has crowned me with loving kindness and tender mercies.' I cannot reason with thy sick faith. All I can say is, I know! I know! I know!"

But she shook her head and was about to send me away when my courage came upon me again and I cried out: "Oh that my master were with the prophet which is in Samaria, for he would recover him from his leprosy!" Then I went away, sorrowful.

But now, O master, let me bring my plea to thee—

(Rachel falls on her knees and begs, with clasped hands.)

Let me entreat thee to break through every barrier of pride and go to him. One alone can heal thee—the God of Israel, whom I worship. Thou art beyond the help of man, for no man, nor angel, ever yet healed a white leper, but thou art not beyond the power and the pity of Jehovah.

NAAMAN—Thou knewest me to be a white leper, Rachel, and yet thou camest in hither? Hast thou some talisman?.

RACHEL—Nay, master, they are forbidden. Thou didst call me and I came. I knew my peril well, for I have seen many lepers, but it is written, He will give his angels charge to keep us. So I put my fears behind me and now, in thy time of need, with God's angel by my side, not even

that angry white curse which spreads so fiercely upon thine arm, could keep me from thee.

But, O master, as thou lovest little Rifka and Rimmona and thy wife, I entreat thee delay not, O delay not, to go to the prophet, which is in Samaria.

(A pause. Naaman rises with resolution.)

NAAMAN—Call Eliezer, secretly and quickly.

(Rachel rises, hurries out and returns with Eliezer.)

NAAMAN—(with vigor.) Eliezer, go thou quickly to the king. Reveal to him plainly the nature of my sickness. Secure from him a letter to Jehoram. Prepare a bounteous reward and a body guard. Put horses to my chariot that I may fulfill a secret mission to Samaria. Keep the whither of our going to thyself. Rachel will inform my family. Now speed thee.

(Eliezer bows and quickly retires.)

NAAMAN—Within this hour, Rachel, I go to Samaria. If thy God heal me not I return no more. The eastern desert is wide and quiet and there I shall meet my doom in solitude.

RACHEL—O master, doubt not Jehovah's power nor yet his kindness! Thou art far within its eirele. Go bravely. Wait not for faith. Thy very going is of faith. Do whatsoever the rough but kindly old prophet may bid thee and thou wilt return.

NAAMAN—And if I do come again what may I bring thee, Rachel?

RACHEL—O, good master, if thou carest for thy hand-maid, bring her a little handful of earth from the land of her fathers, that she may look upon it and hold it in her hands. But, farewell. Now speed thee away and God be with thee. I will make all plain to those thou lovest so well. Hasten, master, hasten!

(Rachel holds out both hands in entreaty that he go quickly. Naaman lifts his hand, as if in blessing, and hurries away, leaving Rachel standing with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, as if in prayer. Then a smile passes over her face, in the fulness of hope, and her lips move in converse with heaven.)

ACT 5.

(Two weeks later. The same room unchanged. No flowers save Rifka's little one lying withered, among the jewels, upon the taboret. Barda, Rifka and Rimmona enter hurriedly, followed by Eliezer, in great excitement and speaking rapidly.)

BARDA—What news? What news, Eliezer?

ELIEZER—Rejoice with me, O house of Naaman! My master has returned from Samaria perfectly healed of his sickness. He will be with you immediately.

BARDA—(excitedly.) Flowers, girls, flowers! Call Rachel, that we may all rejoice together. And, Eliezer, run, bid the King's company, who were here before, to come hither again and make merry with us.

(Eliezer retires as hastily as he had come. Barda, the girls and Rachel bring in abundant flowers, place them joyfully and then retire. Naaman, having first met his family privately, enters, clad in citizen's clothes and wearing the king's decoration, his wife on his arm and the two girls hanging upon them lovingly. They look all about the room, admiring the flowers, then sit down upon the dais, Barda at one side, Rimmona on the other and Rifka on a rug at his feet, her arms on his knees.

Rachel enters, smiling, and carrying a large tray of blooms and greens ready for distribution.)

NAAMAN—And, surely, this must be our little maid, Rachel?

RACHEL—It is I, good master, and I am happy that thou hast returned, and hast not forgotten me.

NAAMAN—It must be that too much joy is making my very vision to swim, Rachel, and thee with it. Surely thou art an angel of God, born to fly in the very firmament of my gladness. Sit down with us, my daughter, and listen while I tell my story.

(Rachel sits down near Rifka, who takes and holds her hand lovingly.)

RIFKA—We prayed for thee every day, dear father, Rachel taught us.

NAAMAN—Ah, I felt it,—and I needed it. Now listen!

I secured a letter from the King to Jehoram and, making my company ready, hurried away from Damascus. In due time we crossed the Jordan and pursued our way over the hills to Samaria.

There I presented Ben-Hadad's letter to Jehoram, who, on reading it, rent his clothes in anger and horror ex-

claiming,— “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send to me to recover a man from his leprosy? Mark how he is seeking a quarrel against me.”

So we went away, chagrined. But this was not the end, for then I recalled the word Rachel had used—that she wished I were with the “prophet” which was in Samaria—and saw that a mistake was possible.

While we tarried the whole city was stirred up over the matter and we learned from the King that the prophet had sent a message to him saying: “Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes. Let him come now to me and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

On hearing this Eliezer quickly put horses to my chariot and we drove in haste to the house of the man of God. Imagine my anger and disgust when, instead of coming out as I thought he would, standing before me and, calling upon the name of his God, striking his hand over the place and recovering me of my leprosy, he simply sent an ill-looking servant to the door who said: “Go, wash in Jordan seven times and thou shalt be clean,” and then shut the door in my face.

I was furious. I said “If I were unclean Abana and Pharpar were better for bathing than all the waters of Israel,” and I went away in a rage.

But by and by Eliezer quietly came near and persuaded me with this argument: If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather, then, when he set thee so easy a task? So, reluctantly, I went down and dipped myself seven times in Jordan when, lo, according to the word of the prophet, suddenly I became clean. My flesh came again upon me, as the flesh of a little child, as it is this day.

Look upon it! Look upon it! (shows his arm.) I could have wept for joy.

So we hurried back to Samaria, driving furiously. As we neared the city the prophet appeared at his door. I gladly acknowledged the God of Israel to be the only true God and begged the prophet to accept a reward, but he refused. Then I remembered Rachel and her request, and asked to be allowed to take some earth from Israel for an altar to Jehovah, explaining that I should still, of necessity, be an attendant upon my King in his devotions in the temple of Rimmon, but that for myself, I should worship only Jehovah.

The old man simply answered: “Go in peace!”

So we turned homeward, happy. Later we sent back a present to some youths from Mt. Ephraim, who had come to visit the prophet, and then with all speed we hurried away, and here we are.

Truly the God of Israel is the only God and henceforth, Rachel, thy God shall be my God.

RIMMONA—(eagerly.) Ours also, dear father, for we love him with all our hearts. Rachel has taught us that.

NAAMAN—Then, indeed, the house of Naaman shall be the temple of Jehovah in Damascus. (to Barda) Was there not somewhere here an old, neglected altar of Rimmon?

RIMMONA—Yea, father, we have been using it to hold our flowers.

NAAMAN—Let Rachel bring it here before me.

(Rachel brings the taboret and places it in the center of the room.)

RIFKA—Why, there's my little flower of hope! I put it there the very day father went away. And, see. These are mother's jewels! How came they here?

BARDA—I laid them there awhile ago in the bitterness of my soul, an offering to Rimmon.

NAAMAN—What wouldst thou do with them now, Barda? There is no God in the house of Naaman save Jehovah.

BARDA—(going to the taboret). Let me hang them upon the neck of Rachel and our two daughters, as a thank offering to the God of Israel, and a token of penitence for my unbelief.

(Barda takes the jewels and bestows them upon the three happy girls.)

NAAMAN—Give me that little, withered flower, Rifka. I would keep it among my jewels. And now, Rachel, remove all the old dust of sacrifice which remains upon the altar top.

(Rachel and the girls dust off the top of the taboret.)

NAAMAN—Now call Eliezer to me. (Rachel calls. Eliezer enters.)

NAAMAN—Eliezer, procure a silver platter and bring in upon it a little of the burthen we fetched from the land of Israel.

(Eliezer retires and soon reappears with earth in a dish.)

NAAMAN—Give it to Rachel and let us see what she will do with it. It is a little gift I brought thee, Rachel, from beyond Jordan.

(Rachel takes the dish of earth from Eliezer. Looks up at Naaman,—then fastens her eyes upon the gift. Kisses it.)

RACHEL—(Softly.) O precious, little earth! trodden by the feet of my father, and of my mother. Oh, how I love thee! Be thou here the blessing of Israel to us all.

(She places the platter upon the top of the taboret, heaping the earth into a little mound.)

RACHEL—Now Eliezer, bring fire and let us lay it upon this new altar.

(Eliezer brings fire, a bit of sponge on a wire, moist with alcohol and lighted outside the room; Rachel lays it upon the top of the mound of earth, throws some incense upon it and, together she and Eliezer blow upon the flame, filling the room with smoke and perfume.)

NAAMAN—(in the best humor, smiling and pointing at the pair.) Dost thou observe, Barda, how well these two build an altar together? And how fragrant the odor which seems to flow from their melted breath?

Is it not a happy omen? There were times indeed, in our absence when I had grave anxiety for Eliezer. A curious sickness seemed to hang upon him, usually toward evening, and I feared that he would desert me and return hither, running, or that perhaps I should be compelled to take him back to the old prophet. But the climate of Damaseus seems to have refreshed him and he has entirely recovered from his indisposition.

Ah, possibly Rachel has beguiled him also of some dire malady! Well, there should be an altar to the God of Love in every home. What thinkest thou on that point, Eliezer?

ELIEZER—Truly, my master! But, surely, first should come the home, (he grasps Rachel's hand,) and a new and happy one simply waits here upon thy good pleasure and permission. May we not receive it and have thy blessing on this joyous day? For I have taken Rachel captive, or, she has captured me, which is it Rachel?

(In glad surprise all gather round the altar, looking at Naaman in expectation.)

NAAMAN—Oh that we knew some of the words of blessing Jehovah has spoken of them that love him, and love each other, for our own seem far too slow and bashful.

RACHEL—(Smiling.) May this captive maiden prompt thee a little, dear master?

NAAMAN—Do so, Rachel, thou hast taken us all captive! Speak, and we will repeat the sacred words, making them our own for thee and for Eliezer.

RACHEL—Come then, Eliezer, stand beside me while these beloved prisoners repeat upon us Israel's ancient blessing.

(Eliezer comes nearer and as they stand together, hand in hand, Rachel, with bowed head, softly recites the words of blessing, which the others repeat, sentence by sentence.)

RACHEL—"The Lord bless thee and keep thee. (All repeat)

"The Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee, (All repeat.)

"The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace." (All repeat.)

NAAMAN—And now let us kneel, in thanksgiving, while Rachel, like a holy priestess, speaks for us the praises of her God and our God.

(All Kneel around the little altar.)

RACHEL—But—pardon, dear master, may not thine own daughters be thy priestesses? Listen to the sweet words I have taught them in the fulness of my hope and expectation of this very day.

(Rimmona and Rifka rise and stand before the altar with clasped hands and uplifted eyes while they recite):

RIMMONA—Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless his holy name.

RIFKA—Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits;

RIMMONA—Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;

RIFKA—Who healeth all thy diseases;

RIMMONA—Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;

RIFKA—Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

BOTH GIRLS—O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men!

(Then all rise, while Rifka runs over to her father, with a small bit of parchment in her hand, saying)

RIFKA—And here's a little one I have learned and written out for thee, dear father. Read it to us.

(Naaman takes the paper and slowly reads aloud.)

NAAMAN—"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

RIFKA—That's for today and tomorrow and all the days to come.

BARDA—Ah, what a marvelous change has passed upon that word "tomorrow". It gleams with pleasure unending now where, before, it was ever full of cloudiness and shrinking.

(Great noise and laughter outside.)

NAAMAN—What may be the cause of all this commotion?

(Here, without any pretense of ceremony, Chanina, Chesil, Zaeli, Abana, the two Syrian women and the group of Court Dancers with their musicians enter noisily, all in festival costume.

Great commotion; all talking at once; the musicians playing as for their lives. All express their heartiest congratulations and good wishes. A space is cleared and the dancers perform one of their most beautiful figures.

As if by accident the whole company surround the altar, which still smokes a little. No reference is made to the ceremony which had just preceded. Abana comes to the center and sings a cheerful song, all present joining in the chorus, forming as the whole group stand together a closing Tableau of Happiness.

Curtain

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mostly children, gave a most intelligent and sweet interpretation of the author's inspiration and the costumes and scenic effects were perfect."

E. C. Oakley, Pastor Cong. Church, Mill Valley: "The play is something different from the usual run. It is artistic, beautiful in its setting and in some parts very impressive. It is not sad, but moving. There is a fine moral quality felt throughout the play, but that is not obtrusive. Its salient characteristics are beauty, art, dignity and high moral tone."

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